

The White House Staff

By Sharon Fabian

Caption: Chief Usher Gary Walters discusses the day's agenda with President Clinton.

The White House is a big house. It is a mansion with one hundred thirty-two rooms. It is a home for the first family, an office for the president and his large staff, a space to hold large events, and a museum. About 6,000 tourists visit it every day. It is also a symbol of our country.

It takes a lot of people to keep the White House the special place that it is. Hundreds, in fact.

There are housekeepers, chefs, carpenters, plumbers, florists, calligraphers, pastry chefs, and electricians. Those are just a few of the occupations of the people whose job it is to keep the White House in order.

The person with the most important job on the household staff is the chief usher. The chief usher is the head of the household staff. His many responsibilities include working on the household budget and supervising the rest of the staff. The chief usher also coordinates with many other agencies who keep the president's day running smoothly such as the Secret Service and the National Park Service. He coordinates official ceremonies at the White House as well as activities for the first family.

The White House also has a doorman. The doorman does more than just opening and closing the front door for visitors. He greets guests, escorts them to the appropriate location in the huge mansion, seats each guest in the right place, and makes sure that every person is treated with the proper courtesies.

Waiters at the White House serve meals to the family, and they also serve at formal state dinners.

Sometimes the president prefers to eat his dinner without waiters hovering in the room. That is why President Jefferson had a dumbwaiter built into the dining room. The dumbwaiter is a set of circular shelves behind a door. Servants placed dishes on the shelves for the diners to serve themselves, so waiters would not need to enter the room. That way, the president could discuss important business without fear that a waiter might leak confidential information.

Housekeepers dust and sweep and even make the beds for the presidential family. They take care of all of the housecleaning in the family part of the White House and also in the hundred or so other rooms, such as the formal parlors known as the Green Room, the Red Room, and the Blue Room. They must know just how to care for each piece of antique furniture in the White House so that the pieces will remain beautiful for hundreds more years.

Chefs prepare food for both the family meals and formal dinners, too. They may consult with the first lady or even prepare sample dishes when deciding just what to prepare for important occasions.

Pastry chefs prepare special desserts. Each Christmas, the pastry chefs prepare a huge gingerbread house. Pastry chefs must be artists, too, because each year's gingerbread house is a work of art. One pastry chef prepared a likeness of President Bush's dog Barney.

Florists in the White house maintain four flower shops. They all keep busy providing flower arrangements for many events, sometimes four or five events in one day.

White House staff members must be flexible. They can be asked to pitch in and help with whatever needs to be done, even if it is not their usual job. For example, at Christmas time, many staff members are needed to set



Name _____



Date _____

up the White House Christmas tree in the Blue Room.

An especially busy day for the White House staff is January 20 in the years when a new president is taking office. They must pack up the old president's family for moving out and unpack the new president's family for moving in on that same day.

Whenever this happens, the staff knows that they will need to be flexible again. They must be ready to serve a new president and a new first family. Unlike the president and the other politicians in Washington, D.C., members of the household staff often make working in the White House their permanent job.

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Questions

- _____ 1. Which is a function for the White House?
- A. home for the president
 - B. place for formal dinners
 - C. symbol of our country
 - D. all of the above
- _____ 2. Which of the following is NOT an occupation mentioned in this article?
- A. computer technician
 - B. pastry chef
 - C. waiter
 - D. electrician
- _____ 3. The person with the most responsibility on the household staff is the _____.
- A. doorman
 - B. chief usher
 - C. head housekeeper
 - D. pastry chef
- _____ 4. Chefs in the White House prepare food for _____.
- A. both
 - B. formal dinners
 - C. neither
 - D. the first family
- _____ 5. Members of the household staff _____.
- A. clean the White House
 - B. write speeches
 - C. lobby Congress
 - D. all of the above
- _____ 6. A _____ prepares flower arrangements.
- A. housekeeper
 - B. doorman
 - C. florist
 - D. chef

Name _____



Date _____

7. Which members of the White House staff might be involved in preparing a large formal dinner?

8. Why is January 20 sometimes a very busy day for the household staff of the White House?

When a new president moves into the White House, what do you think might change for the household staff?

Would you like to have a job as a chef or waiter in the White House? Why or why not?
